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P.O. Box 47600 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7600
(360) 407-6000 • TDD Only (Hearing Impaired) (360) 407-6006

March 18, 1997

Ms. Marilyn Reeves, Chair
Hanford Advisory Board
101 Stewart Street, Suite 1101
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Ms. Reeves:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the Hanford Advisory Board Advice #66 regarding "National Dialogue on Nuclear Material and Waste." At the outset let me say that I am pleased that the Board continues to see the value in a national dialogue and is playing an active role in the organizational efforts. Let me assure you, the state also believes that a broadly based public debate on nuclear material and waste issues is vital to making sustainable decisions.

The disposition of nuclear materials and wastes raises important national issues. The decisions to be made by the U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE) on these matters over the next several years will have important regional, national, and international implications. If we are to avoid the polarization and gridlock which have plagued nuclear waste decisions in the past, we must promote a broad understanding of the issues and the pressing need to resolve them. We must forge solutions which address not only national interests, but also region and local interests. An effective national discussion can do much to further these goals.

I agree with the Board that the concepts of "equity and fairness" are central to a successful dialogue. I also agree that the USDOE must be willing to make a strong commitment to the dialogue process if it is to succeed. USDOE must also be prepared to tell the participants how their input has shaped decisions. Finally, USDOE must be willing to adjust its decision schedules to reasonably accommodate the dialogue. If major decisions will be made before the dialogue has run its course, the dialogue will have little value or utility. At the same time, however, participants must be mindful of the need to make decisions expeditiously.

I support the Board's position that USDOE should not be the sole source of information. Review and verification of background data is also desirable, but should be allowed not to become an overly onerous task. The detail and quality of data and background information should be commensurate with the nature of the discussions to be undertaken.



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Given that the dialogue's goal is to generate principles and values, the discussions are likely to be fairly general and conceptual in nature, not detailed technical examinations.

With regard to participation in the dialogue, I believe it must be open and inclusive. It must ensure that all participants are heard. Participants must be willing to make a commitment to the process and its success. I agree with the Board that participants should not attempt to bargain or negotiate separately with USDOE on waste disposition until the dialogue is completed.

Again, thank you for your interest and work on this important initiative. We look forward to working with you to bring about an effective national dialogue.

Sincerely,



Tom Fitzsimmons
Director

cc: Thomas Grumbly, USDOE HQ
Al Alm, USDOE HQ
Chuck Clarke, EPA
Alice Murphy, USDOE RL
Randy Smith, EPA
Washington & Oregon Congressional Delegations